

An Egilsay Curlew chick, internationally important breeding seabirds Christine Hall

The native wildlife of Orkney is as diverse as it is important, but a new menace is threatening its future.

The archipelago is well known for its wintering waders and waterfowl including redshanks, lapwing and curlews. Its waters are also home to internationally important breeding seabirds such as curlews, great skuas and black guillemot, as well as Tammie Norrie, a local name for the globally threatened Atlantic puffin.

Threatened birds of prey such as the hen harrier and short-eared owl also thrive on Orkney, in part thanks to the Orkney vole which is an important food source for these majestic birds.

However, species that lived together for centuries are now threatened by the non-native stoat. Stoats are thought to have been introduced to the islands by accident. They are significant predators of seabirds, particularly those nesting on the ground which, with few trees, is where most nest on Orkney. They also have a detrimental impact on the Orkney vole.

[quote= Lucy Casot, Head of HLF Scotland]"This is an extremely important project for the Orkney Islands. Wildlife tourism plays a vital part in the economy of this remote area."[/quote]

HLF is supporting the development of a project which will see the situation managed by Scottish Natural Heritage. As well as reducing the number of stoats on the islands, local communities and visiting tourists will be encouraged to get involved with wildlife conservation through walks, talks and events.

Mike Cantlay, the Scottish Natural Heritage chairman, said: “Orkney is spectacularly important for wildlife and wildlife tourism is key to the local economy. Stoats are a major threat to the island’s natural and cultural heritage and we are determined to ensure the success of the partnership project in order to secure the future of Orkney’s important native wildlife.”

Martin Harper, director of global conservation for the RSPB, said: “Invasive species are one of the greatest threats to wildlife around the world and are implicated in the majority of bird extinctions to date. We know that successful eradications can secure the future of island populations and we are delighted to have secured funding to help us safeguard the future of the Orkney vole and so many internationally important populations of birds in Orkney.”

Lucy Casot, Head of HLF Scotland, said: “This is an extremely important project for the Orkney Islands. Wildlife tourism plays a vital part in the economy of this remote area. With the help of funds raised through the National Lottery, the fragile ecological balance can be restored for the benefit of the rare wildlife that lives there and for the islands as a whole.”



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